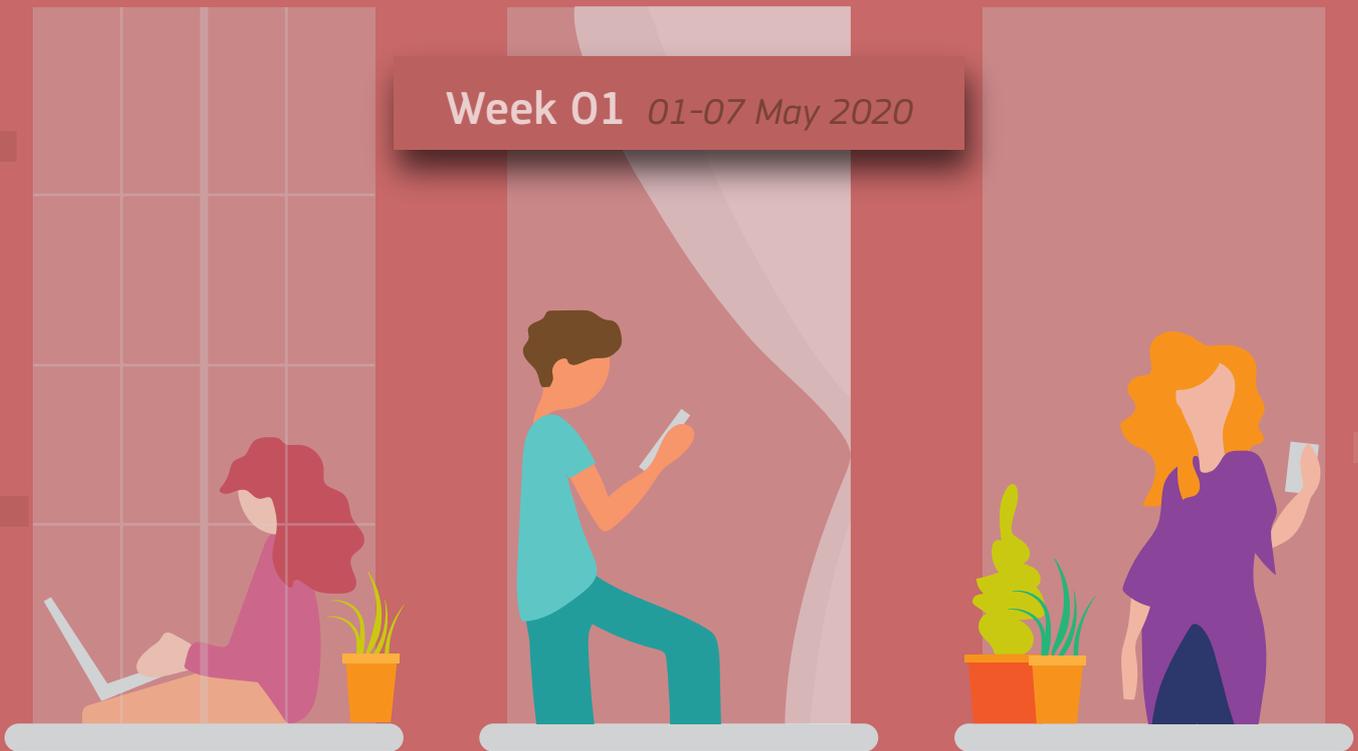




European
Commission

Tracking EU Citizens' Concerns using Google Search Data

Week 01 *01-07 May 2020*



Search



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Tracking EU Citizens' Concerns using Google Search Data

Highlights

- ▶ Analysing the evolution of EU citizens' Google searches provides timely insights on their concerns in the wake of the covid-19 pandemic.
- ▶ In the midst of the pandemic, health-related searches increased in the whole EU. Europeans began looking for covid-19 symptoms as well as methods to protect themselves.
- ▶ Shortly after, economic-related worries increased, with searches for unemployment benefits and fears of layoffs growing by 35% and 70% respectively from the pre-pandemic period. Reassuringly, the adoption of the SURE instrument to mitigate unemployment risks came timely, at the moment when EU citizens' concerns about the economy were at their highest.
- ▶ At the same time, EU citizens began learning how to cope with the lockdown measures imposed in many EU countries. Starting in March, they began searching for tools to cope with smart working and the prolonged social isolation.
- ▶ Latest trends show that, while countries are preparing to lift lockdown measures, worries related to physical health have been overtaken by worries related to mental health. Further, EU citizens are looking into how to take care of themselves (such as doing exercise and improving their nutrition). Searches for expenditure reliefs and state support remain as high as during the peak of the pandemic.

Overview

The SARS-CoV-2 pandemic abruptly changed the life of European citizens. Starting from the first recorded EU hotbed in Northern Italy on February 20th, the virus rapidly spread across several EU countries. In this context, Google searches by EU citizens provide timely insights about Europeans' concerns. As about 90% of EU-27 households have home internet access and the number of internet-connected mobile devices is rapidly increasing, Google searches provide a rather detailed picture of the concerns of the whole EU population.

Against this background, the JRC created a set of indicators to track the evolution over time of Europeans' worries and reactions related to three key domains: health, economy and social isolation. While worries are defined as the instances that might cause difficulties to the EU citizens, reactions include actions and behaviours enacted to cope with the consequences of the pandemic. Each indicator is the result of the aggregation of several topics (groups of keywords queried on Google Search), allowing detailed analyses of different phenomena that are of paramount importance not only in the midst of the pandemic but also in its aftermath.

Weekly updates

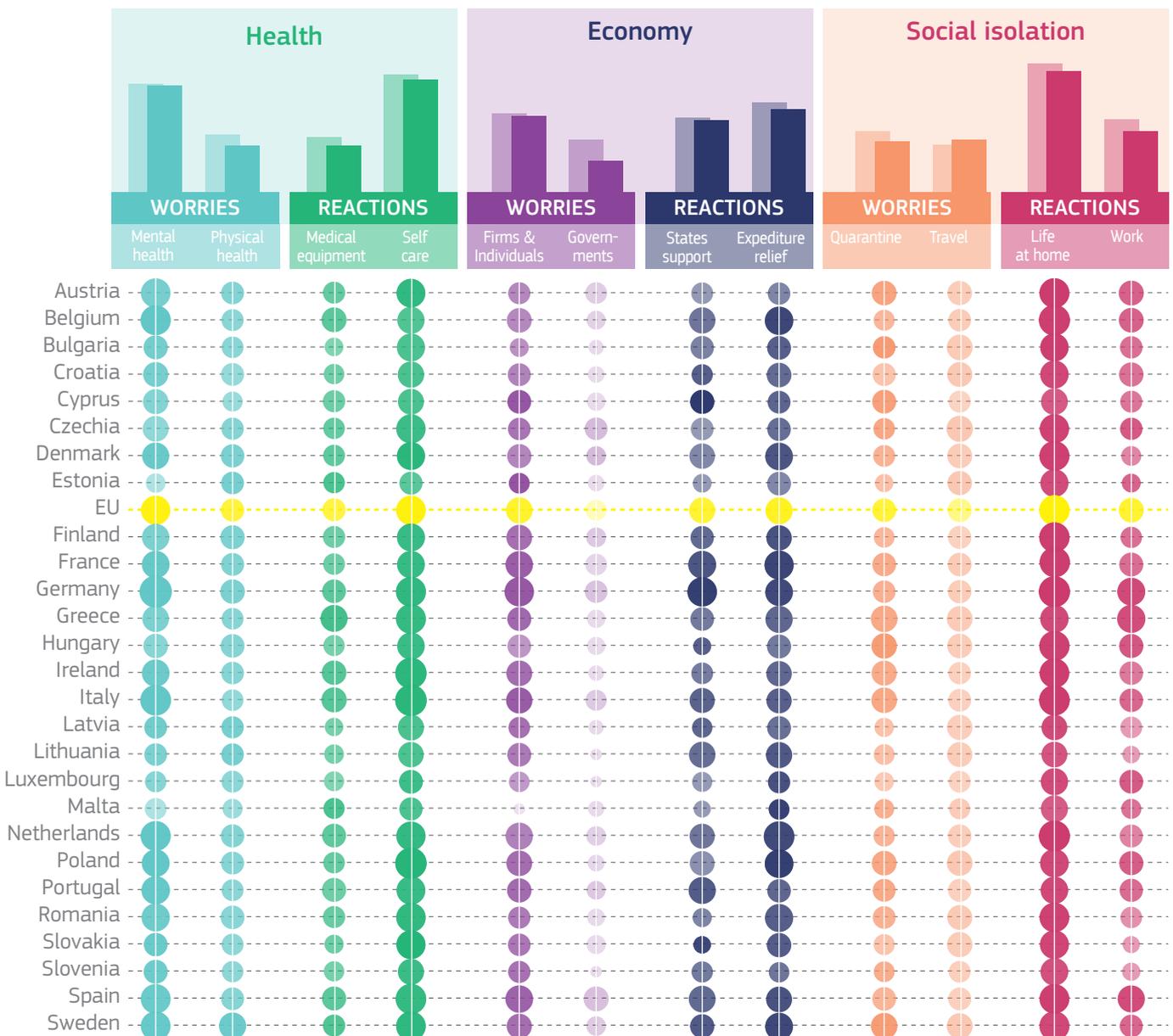
Over the last 7 days recorded (from April 26th to May 3rd), the indicators show that, as many countries are about to ease lockdown measures, worries related to mental health are increasing while worries related to physical health have been decreasing after peaking in March. Further, EU citizens are looking into how to take care of themselves, such as doing physical exercise and improving their nutrition. At the same time, searches for expenditure reliefs and state support as well as searches for ways to cope with social isolation remain very high.

CHART KEY

Histogram shows the difference in the amount of Google searches for each topic

05-25/04/2020
26/04/2020-03/05/2020

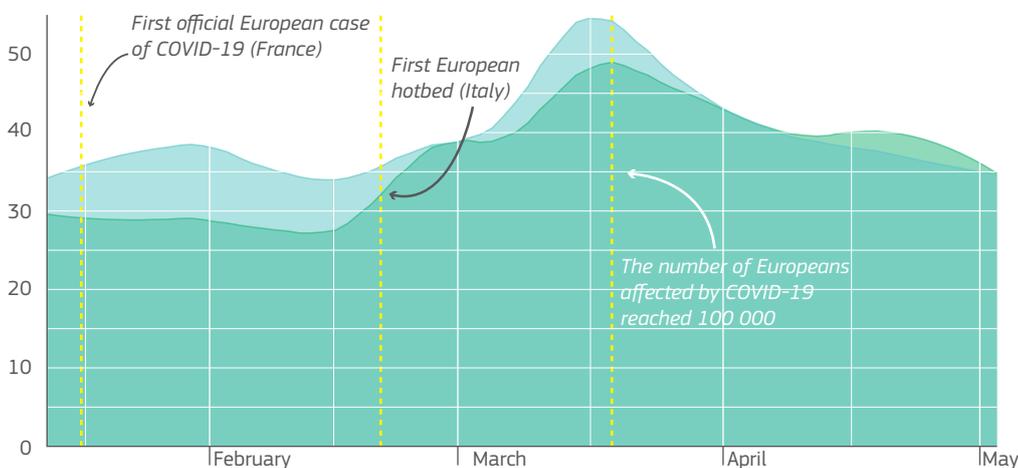
Bubbles size shows the amount of Google searches for each topic in each country



■ Overview of the amount of Google searches in the 27 EU countries (reference period 26/04/2020 - 03/05/2020).

Health

Following the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, Europeans' interest in health-related topics became particularly intense. This domain encompasses worries for physical and mental health, and it captures as reactions changes in lifestyle and habits, such as medical equipment (e.g., searches for dust masks and sanitizers) and self care (such as physical exercises and nutrition).



■ Trends of interest in health-related issues in the 27 EU countries (from 13/01 to 03/05).

WORRIES

Physical health
Cough, Immunity, Symptom, Shortness of breath

Mental health
Anxiety, Panic attack

REACTIONS

Medical equipment
Antiviral drug, Dust mask, Hand sanitizer, Vaccine

Self care
Exercise, Nutrition, Psychotherapy, Yoga

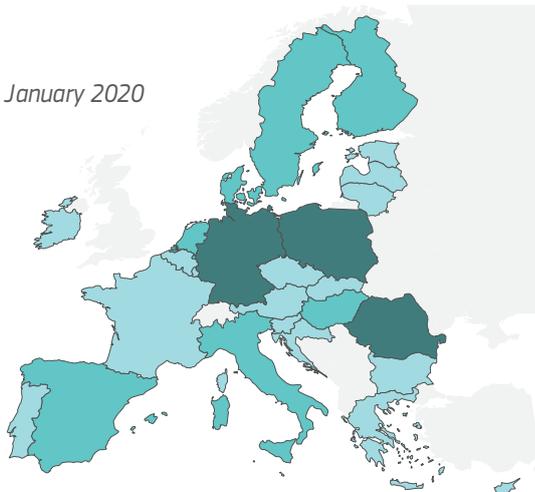
The maps show Europeans' worries on health-related topics prior to the pandemic (13-26 January) and in the midst of it (9-22 March). Although the first official case was identified in France, a medium-high search interest about health-worries related topics was already recorded in Austria, Germany and Romania prior to the pandemic. However, overall, in January people were relatively more concerned about mental health.

After forty days worries radically changed, as Europeans began fearing for their physical health. In particular, the search volume of topics related to worries about physical health increased by about 180% in the EU-27. Only a few countries, such as Czechia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia and Slovenia, did not follow such a trend.

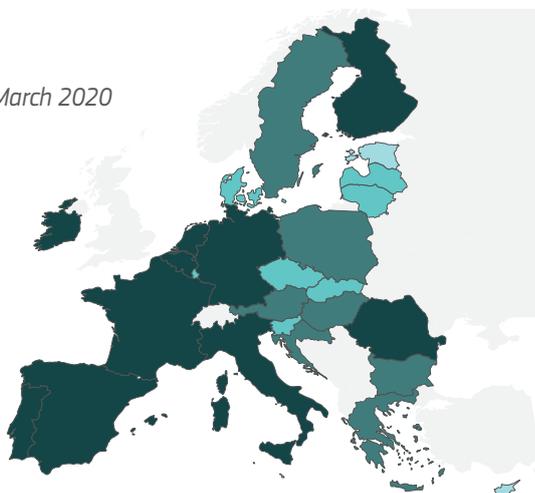
Worries level:



13-26 January 2020



9-22 March 2020

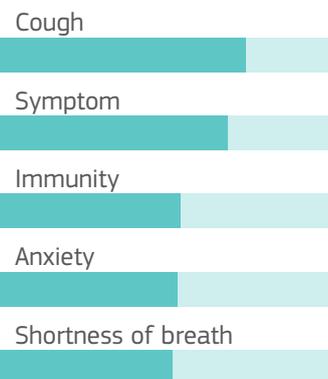


■ Worries about health in EU countries.

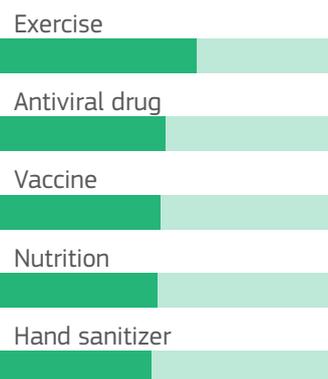
MOST SEARCHED TOPICS

Here listed the most searched topics composing the health related indicators in the week 9-22 March 2020.

WORRIES

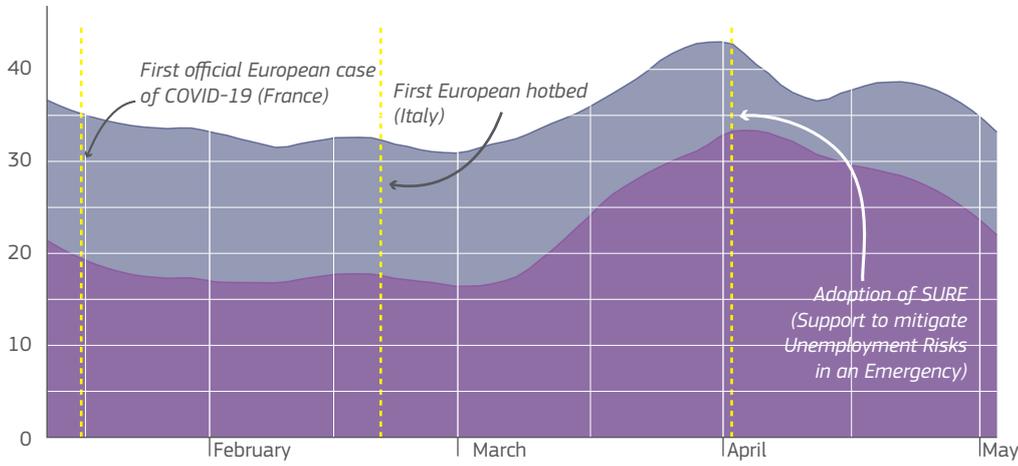


REACTIONS



Economy

This domain encompasses evolutions in the volume of searches capturing both worries and reactions related to the economy. Among worries, terms related to the economic effects of the lockdown have been included, focusing on the consequences for Governments as well as for Firms and Individuals. Reactions, on the other hand, capture how citizens are trying to get through the crisis either by looking at how to reduce their expenditures or with the help of governments' interventions.



■ Trends of interest in economy-related issues in the 27 EU countries (from 13/01 to 03/05).

WORRIES

Firms & individuals
Bankruptcy, Dismissal, Unemployment, Layoff

Governments
Eurobond, European Stability Mechanism, Government Debt

REACTIONS

Expenditure relief
Loan, Moratorium, Mortgage suspension

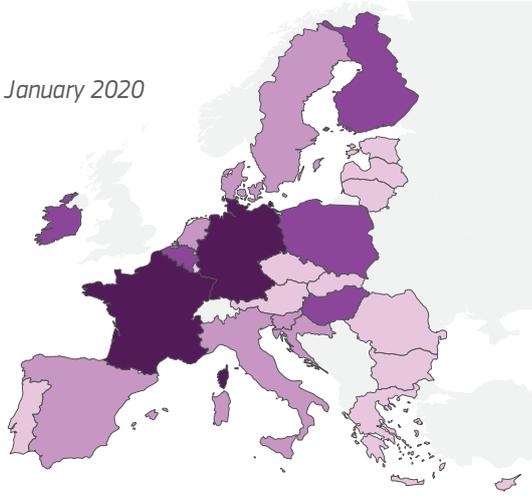
States support
Subsidy, Unemployment benefits

The comparison between the map before (13-26 January) and during (9-22 March) the pandemic, portrays a common increase among almost all countries with respect to economic worries.

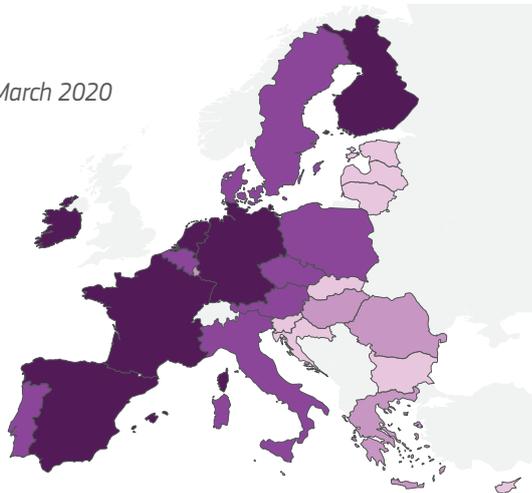
Although German and French citizens were already showing a high search interest in economy-related worries prior to the crisis, the increase has been sizeable. Both government and firms and individuals related worries increased by about 25% in the 40 days in which the virus began spreading across the EU. In particular, search for keywords related to unemployment increased by about 60%, while the debate about the EU economic measures to fight the crisis brought a rise in the search volume for topics such as the Eurobonds (+160%) and government debt (+23%).

Worries level: Low High

13-26 January 2020



9-22 March 2020



■ Worries about the economy in EU countries.

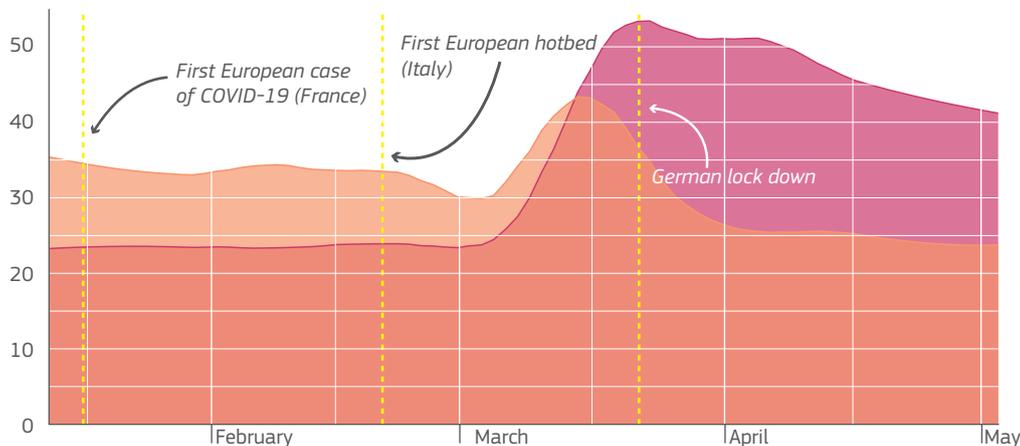
MOST SEARCHED TOPICS

Here listed the most searched topics composing the economy related indicators in the week 9-22 March 2020.



Social isolation

One of the consequences of the restrictive measures adopted in Member States is the social isolation of citizens, who are asked to limit their social interactions. Therefore, this domain encompasses evolutions in the volume of searches capturing both topics related to travel and quarantine expectations (worries) and topics describing how citizens are coping with restrictive measures, in terms of work and private life (reactions). Looking at how citizens have been adapting to life at home, the analysis considers both online activities and offline activities.



■ Trends of interest in social isolation-related issues in the 27 EU countries (from 13/01 to 03/05).

WORRIES

Quarantine expectation

Lockdown, Quarantine, Social distancing

Travel

Bus, Flight, Train

REACTIONS

Life at home

Book, Do it yourself, Gardening, Online game, Recipe, Streaming media

Work

Telecommuting, Video conference, Videotelephony

MOST SEARCHED TOPICS

Here listed the most searched topics composing the social isolation related indicators in the week 9-22 March 2020.

WORRIES

Quarantine

Flights

Bus

Lockdown

Train

REACTIONS

Book

Online game

Streaming media

Recipe

Videotelephony

Worries level:

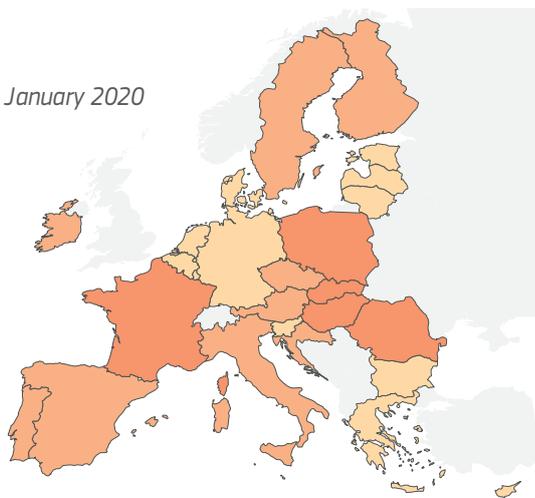
Low

High

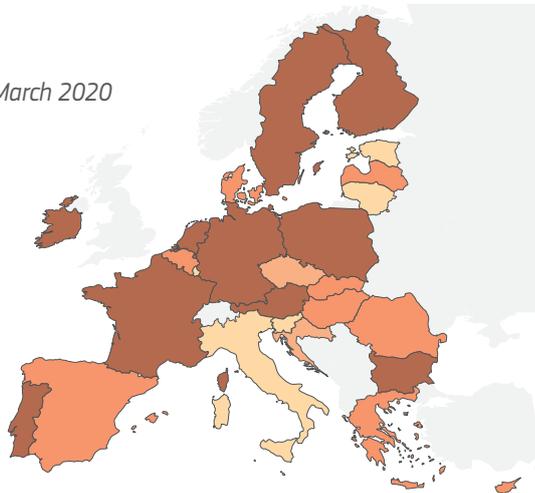
From the pre-crisis (13-26 January) to the crisis period (9-22 March) the indicator on worries related to social isolation documented a relevant decrease in the search volume for topics in the Travel pillar (-38.2%): the interest for 'Train' in particular has shown a 45.9% drop. At the same time, searches for topics in the Quarantine expectations pillar soared, with all underlying topics rising sharply, and 'social distancing' showing a relevant search volume for the first time since January.

The indicator on social isolation reactions has shown a sharp increase in communication tools within the Work pillar, with the search volume for 'video conference' raising by more than 1.400%. In the 'Life at home' pillar, an increase has been noticed both for online entertainment and for searches related to offline activities like gardening increased 50% in the observed timespan.

13-26 January 2020



9-22 March 2020



■ Worries about social isolation in EU countries.



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